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THE GARDEN CALENDAR

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A radio discussion by W. R. Beattie, Bureau of Plant Industry, delivered in the Department of Agriculture period of the National Farm and Home Hour, broadcast by a network of 48 associate NBC radio stations Monday, February 25, 1935.

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Hello Folks. The sun is shining brightly in Washington today, this morning and yestermorning the crows were calling and mocking birds and other birds were singing lustily in the hedges and the apple trees. Winter for us is perhaps far from over but days like yesterday and today are a reminder that it will not be long until the dandelions will be blooming, the poke sprouts will be appearing and the old colored women of Washington will be abroad with their baskets and knives cutting wild cross greens in the parks and the open spaces. Spring has arrived for many of you southern people and it will not be long until the buds are swelling in the sections that are still snow and ice-bound.

Our Daily News man often remarks that "all he knows is what he writes for the papers." I sometimes think that all I know is what I write to you folks in letters. Anyway those hundred and hundreds of letters that are coming to me nowadays are a revelation as to what is in the minds of the people who live on farms and in villages where they have land on which to grow a garden and certain fruits. Incidentally I am somewhat behind in answering these letters but we are doing the best we can to get out the replies and so if you happen to be one of those who are looking for a reply just be a little patient with us.

Today I want to give you a few notes on one of the earliest of our spring vegetables, likewise one of the oddest plants that we grow in our gardens. I refer to that splendid vegetable - asparagus. Asparagus is one of the oldest of our cultivated vegetables, it is a native of Europe and was cultivated by the ancient Greeks and Romans. In this country it can be grown almost everywhere except it does not do extra well along the Gulf Coast and in Florida. Incidentally it belongs to the Lily family but has no true leaves, the bracts or scales on the stems and the finely divided branches serving the plant for leaves.

The cultivation of asparagus in the home garden or on a small scale for the market is a comparatively simple process. It does best on a deep sandy loam or a light alluvial or clay loam. The soil should be prepared and fertilized deep using commercial fertilizers and manure to enrich the soil. For planting in the home garden it is a good plan to open a furrow about 6 or 7 inches deep and 18 inches wide then work a quantity of bone meal and plenty of manure into the soil. An all-round fertilizer such as you would use for potatoes will be all right but use a pailfull to each 100 feet of row and work it in deep.

Asparagus plants are grown from seed and one-year-old plants are best, but you want good, strong plants with a root spread of 15 to 22 inches. The Mary Washington variety is by far the best general purpose variety for green asparagus and the green asparagus is considered best for home use. One hundred good roots will cost you about \$2 and 100 roots will be enough for the average family. Set the roots 36 inches apart in the rows, or about 33 roots to each 100 feet of row. That will mean three 100 feet rows for the average garden. Place the rows 4 or 5 feet apart, if you have the room to spare, or you can place them a little closer if you are crowded.

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When you receive your asparagus roots unpack them and soak them in a tub of water for three or four hours then plant them. Spread the roots evenly in all directions in the bottom of the furrow and cover them only about 2 inches at first, then after the tops begin to form you can gradually work the remaining soil into the furrow but do not completely fill the furrow until late in the fall of the first season. None of the asparagus should be cut the spring following planting and the cutting should not be extended beyond 6 weeks the second year. After that the cutting may continue for 10 to 12 weeks or until you get tired of eating asparagus and other green vegetables take its place. If you want the white, bleached asparagus you simply mound the earth over the hills or rows and then cut the spears 4 or 5 inches below the surface by means of a long cutter that looks somewhat like a screw driver but with a broad point. For green asparagus, and I prefer mine green, you simply let it grow up to a height of 5 or 6 inches before cutting.

Like most members of the lily family the asparagus stores up energy in its fleshy roots during the summer and it is this reserve that produces the crop of spears or shoots the following spring. For this reason it is important that the asparagus plants be well fertilized and cultivated following the close of the cutting period. When commercial asparagus growers stop cutting they give their asparagus a good working out to remove all weeds, apply 1,000 pounds or more of fertilizer to the acre and very frequently plant cowpeas or soybeans in the spaces between the rows as a soil improving crop. The addition of fertilizer and a top-dressing of rotted manure at the close of the cutting season is recommended for the home garden asparagus patch. An occasional hoeing and watering during dry periods will also aid materially.

Asparagus is troubled by a disease known as rust but the Washington varieties are practically immune to this disease. Another point, you must protect your asparagus during the summer from the asparagus beetle, a tiny beetle which feeds upon the green tops that serve as foliage. This can be accomplished by dusting the plants occasionally with some arsenical poison such as Paris green or lead arsenate the same as you would use for the control, of potato beetles, or you can spray the plants with any poison such as you would use on potatoes. In the fall after frost you cut off the asparagus tops and burn them and that is all you need to do until the shoots or spears begin to push through the soil in the spring. The nice thing about growing your own asparagus is that you can have it fresh from your garden and on the table in less than an hour.